

# **University Link LRT Extension**

## **Seattle, Washington**

(November 2009)

The Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (Sound Transit) is constructing an extension of the Central Link light rail transit (LRT) Initial Segment from its terminus at Westlake Station in downtown Seattle to the University of Washington, 3.1 miles to the northeast. The all-tunnel alignment includes a station at Capitol Hill. Twenty-seven vehicles would be procured as part of the project, which would permit five-minute peak-period operations throughout the entire Central Link line. University Link is the first phase of Sound Transit's planned North Link LRT extension to the Northgate Transit Center in North Seattle.

The University Link corridor is the most densely developed residential and employment area in Seattle and the state of Washington. The three largest urban centers in the state – downtown Seattle, Capitol Hill/First Hill, and the University District – are located along the alignment. Travel by private vehicle and bus between these areas is extremely congested due to high traffic volumes and the corridor's geography. First Hill and Capitol Hill rise sharply northeast of downtown Seattle, and Interstate 5 (I-5) – the region's primary north-south freeway corridor – runs along the base of these hills, separating them from downtown. Farther to the north, the University District is separated from Capitol Hill and downtown by Portage Bay and the Lake Washington Ship Canal; only three crossings (two of them drawbridges) connect the University with the southern portion of the corridor.

Reversible express lanes on I-5 north of downtown result in a disparity between northbound and southbound transit travel times during peak periods. The University Link LRT Extension is intended to provide more reliable and faster bi-directional transit service to and between downtown Seattle, Capitol Hill/First Hill, and the University District, while supporting local land use goals and contributing to the maintenance of 1990 traffic levels at the University of Washington. The project is expected to serve approximately 40,200 average weekday boardings in 2030.

The total project cost under the Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) is \$1,947.68 million. The Section 5309 New Starts funding share is \$813.00 million.

## **Status**

The University Link LRT Extension is part of the Central Link LRT system that has been in planning for more than two decades. In 1999, Sound Transit published an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a Central Link alignment extending from South 200<sup>th</sup> Street in the City of SeaTac to North 103<sup>rd</sup> Street in the City of Seattle. Due to financial constraints, Sound Transit identified three operable segments for implementation, the first of which extended from just south of downtown Seattle to the University of Washington. FTA awarded an FFGA for this project in January 2001, which was suspended later that year due to cost increases.

Sound Transit redefined the project as an "Initial Segment" from Westlake Station in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel south to Tukwila, which was constructed under an FFGA executed by FTA in October 2003 and opened for revenue service in July 2009. Sound Transit completed a Supplemental Draft EIS for the North Link segment in December 2003, and the Sound Transit Board selected the 3.1-mile University Link Extension as the first phase in August 2005. FTA issued a limited-scope Supplemental Draft EIS in October 2005 to address changes in the preferred alternative, including an alternative route through the University of Washington. FTA approved the project into preliminary

engineering in December 2005. FTA issued a Final EIS in April 2006 and a Record of Decision in June 2006. FTA approved the project into final design (FD) in December 2006. Sound Transit and FTA executed an FFGA in January 2009, with revenue operations scheduled for April 2017. Construction work is just beginning on the project. Right of way acquisitions are underway. Pile installation was initiated on the west side in late July and is now complete. Foundations for the Catenary are being placed and also two TBM shafts are under construction.

SAFETEA-LU Section 3043(c)(231) authorized the University Link LRT Extension for FD and construction. Through FY 2010, Congress has appropriated \$272.60 million in Section 5309 New Starts funds for the project including \$44.00 million in ARRA funds.

<b>Reported in Year of Expenditure Dollars</b>		
<b><u>Source of Funds</u></b>	<b><u>Total Funding (\$million)</u></b>	<b><u>Appropriations to Date</u></b>
<b>Federal:</b> Section 5309 New Starts FFGA Commitment  FHWA Flexible Funds (CMAQ) Section 5309 Fixed Guideway Modernization	\$813.00  \$9.00 \$3.00	\$272.60 million in total appropriations through FY 2010. This includes \$44.00 million in ARRA funds.
<b>Local:</b> Bond Proceeds, Local Option Tax Revenues, Sales of Excess ROW	\$1,122.68	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,947.68</b>	

**NOTES:** The sum of the figures may differ from the total as listed due to rounding.

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